

HAZY SHADE OF BLUE

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OPEN BOOK UNBOUND WRITING

The kid held up his shorts with one hand and carried a cup of juice in the other. The juice was in a thin plastic cup, the kind that collapses if you squeeze too hard, so the kid had to concentrate twice over. First to make sure he didn't crush the cup, second to make sure he didn't sloosh his juice. That was a lot of concentration for a little kid, plus there was the issue of holding up his shorts, but it was working out just fine until he saw the ball.

The ball was a hazy shade of blue. It was begging to be picked up by the kid and carried around by him. Like he owned it. Like it was a part of him. But if he picked up the ball he'd either have to give up the juice or let go of the shorts. He stared at the ball for a while longer and then let go of the shorts.

The kid scooped up the ball and cradled it in the crook of his arm. Holding it with two hands would be better. Then he could get into the whole ball-ness of it, maybe throw it into the air and catch it again, or toss it from one hand to the other, but he couldn't put the juice down. He'd made a commitment. The juice was part of him before the ball came on the scene.

He felt pretty good when he walked off with the ball and the juice. Like he was the A-number one boss-dude-kid. A kid like no other. A kid with a hazy blue ball and a juice. He felt so good that it didn't matter when his shorts started falling down, not even when they got to his ankles which didn't take more than a few steps. He still felt good because he had the ball and he had the juice.

The kid adapted to the situation. He shuffled along with his feet wrapped in the shorts and before long he was shuffling pretty good. He looped around the play area, along the terrace, and down the ramp towards the pool. The pool was the same hazy shade of blue as the ball. Maybe that's why the kid gravitated towards it.

A different colour of tile formed a narrow path around the pool's edge. The kid got onto this narrow path and shuffled along it, still with the juice in one hand, the ball in the other. He couldn't get any closer to the pool without getting wet, but nobody called out. Nobody said, *hey kid, what are you doing so close to the edge of that pool? Are you crazy? Get away from there. Nobody said a thing.*

The pool was deeper than the kid was tall with plenty enough water for drowning in, but the kid didn't drown. He didn't even get wet because halfway around the pool he stopped and had a sip of juice, and when he'd slaked his thirst he veered off the narrow path and shuffled his way through a forest of white plastic chairs and tables with people clustered all around. The people were talking and smoking and drinking a different kind of juice from the one the kid had.

When he got past the forest the kid had another decision to make. There was a ramp like the one he'd come down on the other side of the pool, with a nice gentle slope. Just fine for shuffling up when your shorts were at your ankles, but this kid was tough – he made difficult choices. He took the stairs.

The shorts were cloth manacles. There wasn't much give in them, so the kid had to take the stairs nice and easy. He was half-way up and managing just fine when a woman in the forest spotted him. She left her perch and swooped in, snatching away his juice. The kid barely had time to react before she circled back. This time it was the kid she snatched up. She dropped him at the top of the stairs next to the play area and said something to him. The kid put down the ball. He watched it roll away while the woman pulled up his shorts. She fastened them tight before returning to the forest. The kid watched her go.

No longer burdened by the responsibilities of ball, juice, or shorts gathering around his ankles, the kid turned his face skywards. Now he felt light. He felt free. He flapped his arms and his feet left the ground. He flapped harder and soon he was soaring over the white plastic forest, flying fast and high as a swift above the pool and the people clustered all around.

Nobody noticed. Nobody said, *hey kid, are you crazy? What are you doing there, flying so high and fast like that? Get back down here.* But the woman, a shiver went through her. She stood up and glanced around, checking out the pool and the play area and all the places in between, but the kid was nowhere to be seen.

When there was nowhere else to look on the ground she turned her gaze high to the sky but all she could see was a tiny bird silhouetted against a hazy shade of blue.

Lorraine Thomson's latest book, Modernist Dreams Brutalist Nightmares, is a narrative memoir about being part of the first generation to grow up in Scotland's most ambitious new town. It will be published by Outcast Press in October 2022. @LGThomson1 // thrillerswithattitude.co.uk